CHESS AND POKER:
Intelligence Drives Operations

CAPTAIN BRANDON ANDERSON

From Rogers' Rangers Standing Orders:

11. Don't ever march home the same way. Take a different route so you won't be ambushed.

16. Don't cross a river by a regular ford.

17. If somebody's trailing you, make a circle, come back onto your own tracks, and ambush the folks that aim to ambush you.

> *It as if we have been playing chess and the enemy has been playing poker.*
>
> **— Sir Robert Thompson**

Intelligence drives operations. In a counterinsurgency, insurgents attack coalition forces based on their patterns of activity. Coalition forces attack insurgents based on intelligence on their location. Without establishing a targetable pattern that allows insurgents to emplace an effective ambush, counterinsurgents are not easily targeted. Without effective intelligence on the location of insurgents, the superior firepower and numbers of counterinsurgents are meaningless. The challenge across Iraq and Afghanistan on the tactical level is one where coalition forces work to vary their patterns to avoid being attacked while gaining intelligence on the location of insurgents in order to take the initiative and target them.

Everywhere Soldiers go in this operational environment, they must assume they are being watched. It is a difficult and frustrating thing. The counterinsurgent carries arms openly and tries to establish order, while the insurgent hides in the shadows and needs only create chaos. It is infinitely easier to break a window than it is to make one. It is much easier to create chaos than order. The purpose of this article is to discuss successful techniques to frustrate enemy attempts to attack counterinsurgents while gathering information on insurgent locations and activities in order to take the fight to him.

Patterning, Targeting, Ambushing

Major Robert Rogers' Standing Orders for avoiding ambush are as relevant today as they were in 1759. The vast majority of casualties in a counterinsurgency are not taken on the objective. With few exceptions, most Soldiers are wounded or killed getting to or from the objective. The enemy's most effective tactic is not holding strongpoints, hilltops, or bridgeheads; in Iraq and Afghanistan he is most effective in the attrition of coalition forces in ambushes. Whether they are in the form of small arms fire, rocket-propelled grenades (RPGs), improvised explosive devices (IEDs), vehicle-borne or person-borne IEDs, or any combination; the common denominator for these attacks is that the enemy must set up his attack in a location where it is reasonable to expect coalition forces to come. This is especially true in urban terrain, where enemy forces cannot leave dumb weapons such as mines unattended and get the effect they desire, to undermine public support for the counterinsurgent and the government he supports. The enemy has to be there to pull the trigger or push the button. To attack you, he has to anticipate where you will be and when you will be there.

The ambushes that are set for coalition forces in Afghanistan and Iraq are based on the observations and analysis done by insurgent forces to find the best time, place, and manner for them to attack. The argument is sometimes made that insurgents have no doctrine and therefore cannot be predicted. Doctrine is a set of principles extracted from experience that allows those who fight to do so more effectively. Insurgents are continuously adapting or dying. All of the dumb ones are dead. This leaves behind a cadre of hardened fighters who know how to survive, whether they realize it or not. If what they were doing was not effective, they would not be able to do it anymore. Books like *The Other Side of the Mountain: Mujahideen Tactics in the Soviet-Afghan War* by Ali Ahmad Jalili and Lester W. Grau, document consistently used enemy tactics that were and are effective. After all, doctrine is nothing more than principles derived from successful operations. For this reason there are certain constants. The enemy will not waste his time waiting to ambush coalition forces in an area they are not likely to come through, and generally he will not fight in a location where there is no chance of escape. He will go to a location where there has been a consistent amount of coalition activity, a good likelihood of having coalition forces to attack, and a reasonable chance of escaping to anonymity. To do this, he only needs to watch and analyze the patterns created by coalition forces, where they go and at what times. The most frequently used route, most likely avenue of approach for coalition forces is where the insurgent is most likely to attack. For this reason patrol leaders must have situational awareness of where and when coalition forces have recently gone in their area of operations. Insurgents will attack only at a time and place where they are likely to find coalition forces. That is why alternate routes and the honesty trace system are useful tools.

Alternate Routes and the Honesty Trace System

One of the critical tasks that commanders must accomplish when they come into a new area of operations is to reconnoiter all possible routes to and from important places in their area of operations. Identifying several avenues of approach for mounted and dismounted movements gives patrol leaders several options for

getting from the base to the objective without getting ambushed. Given the hectic pace of operations and challenges inherent in navigating some of the urban sprawl in Southwest Asia, it is imperative that leaders identify and enforce the use of alternate routes to prevent their patrols from being easily patterned, targeted and ambushed. Patrol leaders must become comfortable with the several routes they can choose from in the area of operations as soon as possible. It is not enough to use the easiest route or the shortest route, because that is the route where the ambush is likely waiting.

The next step in maximizing variety and situational awareness is use of the honesty trace board. This technique was developed by the British Army during the troubles in Northern Ireland and discovered by the author when he was working with Task Force Helmand in Afghanistan. When patrol leaders return from missions, they go to the honesty trace map and draw where they went with the date/time group on the honesty trace board, which is acetate placed over a satellite image of the area of operations. If every patrol leader in the area draws where and when he went in the AO on the honesty trace board, the full picture of when and how the enemy is most likely to attack becomes clear. The honesty trace board allows the patrol leader to share when and where he went on patrol as well as to know where others have gone, to avoid establishing a targetable pattern. For example: SSG Johnson returns from using Route Red as his infil and Route Green as his exfil after his mission to District Headquarters, with an infil time of 19 0500 January and an exfil time of 19 1900 January. When LT Jones goes out on patrol the next day, he will be able to check the honesty trace board to see who has been where, and based on CF activity take a different route such as Route Blue, Maroon, or Orange. Based on the times and routes previously used, as well as recent significant activities, patrol leaders will be able to make a more informed choice of how to get where they need to go without exposing themselves to more danger than they have to. (If you would like to see an example honesty trace board, send an e-mail to BENN.CATD.Inf.MagazineDep@conus.army.mil.)

> **While frustrating enemy attempts at ambushing coalition forces may save lives, it alone will not win the war. Only effectively targeting insurgent forces, transitioning to locally-supported indigenous security forces, and gaining local support for the government can do that.**

Insurgents do not have the time and resources to ambush six or seven routes, or continuously observe six or seven routes. At best, they want coalition forces to take the same route on and off of the objective so that they have the time to set an easy ambush. Setting an ambush on the one road coalition forces use is not hard. However, setting seven ambushes in seven different locations with the hope that one will have contact with a patrol is something that most insurgent groups do not have the time, resources, or discipline to do.

Commanders must make an assessment based on the terrain and enemy capabilities on whether it is safe to drive on certain routes, and this assessment is likely to change throughout the deployment. If the threat is particularly high for explosively formed penetrators (EFPs) versus mines, paved roads may or may not be the best option. However, when applied based on the threat situation the principle of varying routes and times is a sound and effective one.

Identifying several routes and using the honesty trace system is an effective technique, but it will only buy time. While frustrating enemy attempts at ambushing coalition forces may save lives, it alone will not win the war. Only effectively targeting insurgent forces, transitioning to locally-supported indigenous security forces, and gaining local support for the government can do that.

"It is their war, and they have to win it."
— **President Kennedy** regarding Vietnam

On the opposite side of the poker table, counterinsurgents are trying to find and destroy insurgents, or better yet make them irrelevant by undermining their cause. The modern table of organization and equipment (MTOE) for a rifle company does not come complete with an intelligence shop. However, there are effective adaptations that commanders can implement to gather information and vet it into intelligence at their level. FM 3-24 recommends creating an intel shop at the company level to keep track of all of the information for operations at the company level. This is an excellent technique, but the largest gap that needs to

Courtesy photos

Transitioning to locally-supported indigenous security forces will help defeat the insurgency.

These and other signs were placed in the town bazaar and other key locations in the town. They encourage Iraqis to report police abuses, suicide bombers, and Taliban activities for a $500 reward.

be bridged is how to find the insurgents. The answer lies in gaining the support of the local population. If all of the insurgents in Afghanistan and Iraq were to make their identities and whereabouts clear, it would be a simple matter for the superior firepower of our military to close with and destroy them. This is because the greatest weapon and greatest advantage of an insurgent is his anonymity. The critical discipline in counterinsurgency, the missing link as it were, comes down to human intelligence. There simply can be no initiative in counterinsurgency without intelligence, and the best intelligence in this kind of war comes from people. This is underscored by the fact that the very nature of the enemy in this type of war is to cling to anonymity and hide in complex terrain, be it urban or rural, where they are indistinguishable from peaceful citizens. The best resource for finding out who is an insurgent and who is a farmer or shopkeeper are the farmers and shopkeepers themselves; people who have lived in the area and know it best. However, the people will not be willing or able to give information on insurgent activities to security forces without proper motivation and a reasonable expectation of safety.

Even if local nationals want to give information to coalition and government forces, there is a very real fear of reprisal. The challenge for leaders at the company level and below becomes finding opportunities for locals to give information to them without setting their informants up for reprisal. When I was deployed east of Ramadi, Iraq, whole families were killed in reprisal for giving information on insurgent activity. In Gereshk, Afghanistan, a night letter from November 2007 clearly stated that Afghans who dared to expose the location of suicide bombers and other insurgents would be decapitated. Some of the effective techniques that the British and American Armies have developed to counter this are Operation Neighbors or courtesy weapons inspections. Both are excellent techniques for engaging local people through indigenous forces to gather

information. Operation Neighbor consists of conducting joint patrols to engage locals and give them the opportunity to pass intelligence. Courtesy weapons inspections are much the same. Ideally, the courtesy weapons inspection patrol will be led by indigenous forces, police or army, to courteously check the home for illegal weapons or materials while speaking with the head of household. These patrols are conducted with the intent of giving people in the area who want to support the government an opportunity to pass information on insurgent activity. These patrols are effectively reconnaissance patrols with the purpose of gaining public support in order to locate insurgents, the most difficult task for those engaged in a counterinsurgency.

Another effective technique for leaders at the company level is to establish a local information line. In Gereshk, signs were made with field ordering officer (FOO) money and placed in the bazaar and other key areas. The signs announced a reward for information on suicide bombers and Taliban activity on one side, and to use the hotline to report police abuses on the other. A local cellular phone number was painted on the signs and the phone was controlled by U.S. forces or a category II interpreter. The Police Information Line in Gereshk was established to allow locals to pass information to coalition forces without fear of reprisal. Once this information was vetted and turned into intelligence, it allowed coalition forces to investigate allegations of police misconduct and gather information on enemy forces.

Intelligence drives operations. The greatest strength of the insurgent is his anonymity through the active or passive support of the people. If that is stripped away, he becomes a fugitive. The greatest weakness of coalition forces is their vulnerability to enemy ambushes as they go about securing the population, gathering intelligence, and taking the fight to the enemy. The use of alternate routes and the honesty trace system is an excellent technique to frustrate insurgent attempts to pattern, target, and ambush coalition forces. Methods to maximize interaction with local people such as Operation Neighbors, courtesy weapons inspections, and the Police Information Line allow coalition forces to have a more effective link with the population whose support they must gain in order to defeat the insurgency. On a long enough time line, the COIN effort must be won by the people, police, and army of the country where the insurgency is taking place. Only by working through indigenous forces to gain the support of the people can coalition forces effectively set the conditions for the defeat of the insurgency. Until that time, coalition and government forces must fight as shrewdly as possible to ambush the enemy before he ambushes them.